

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 2-3 and 13-17 have been previously canceled without prejudice.

Please amend claims 1, 25, and 31.

Please enter the pending claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus comprising:
 - a holder to mount a substrate;
 - a stage to position said holder in a chamber;
 - an imaging system to locate an opaque defect on said substrate, said imaging system disposed vertically above said substrate, said imaging system comprising a first electron column, said first electron column to direct a first set of electrons towards said opaque defect;
 - a gas delivery system to dispense a reactant gas towards said opaque defect; and
 - an electron delivery system to induce chemical etching of said opaque defect by said reactant gas without damaging underlying layers, said electron delivery system comprising a second electron column, said second electron column to direct a second set of electrons towards said opaque defect.

2. – 3. (Canceled)

4. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said substrate comprises a transmissive DUV mask.
5. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 4 wherein said opaque defect comprises chrome and said reactant gas comprises chlorine and oxygen.
6. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said substrate comprises a reflective EUV mask.
7. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 6 wherein said opaque defect comprises an absorber and said reactant gas comprises Xenon Fluoride (XeF_2).
8. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said opaque defect comprises Carbon and said reactant gas comprises water vapor or oxygen.
9. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a focusing system to highly focus said second set of electrons on said opaque defect.
10. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a scanning system to scan said second set of electrons across said opaque defect.

11. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an acceleration system to provide a low acceleration voltage for said second set of electrons.

12. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a computer to control said electron delivery system.

13. - 17. (Canceled)

18. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said gas delivery system is further to dispense a carrier gas towards said opaque defect.

19. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said gas delivery system is to dispense said reactant gas with an angular dispersion of 5-25 degrees.

20. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said reactant gas is to adsorb to said opaque defect and is to become disassociated.

21. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said chamber comprises a pressure of about 0.500-10.000 milliTorr (mT) locally over said opaque defect.

22. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said second set of electrons is to form a beam comprising a current of about 0.050-1.000 nanoAmperes (nA).

23. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said second set of electrons is to form a beam comprising a tail diameter of about 5-125 nm.

24. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said second set of electrons is to comprise a range of 0.3-3.0 keV.

25. (Currently Amended) An apparatus comprising:

- a chamber;

- a stage disposed in said chamber, said stage to move in different directions;

- a holder positioned in said chamber by said stage;

- a mask mounted on said holder;

- an opaque defect disposed on said mask;

- an imaging system for said chamber, said imaging system disposed directly above said opaque defect, said imaging system to locate said opaque defect;

- a gas delivery system for said chamber;

- a gas dispensed by said gas delivery system towards said opaque defect;

- an electron delivery system for said chamber;

- electrons directed by said electron delivery system towards said opaque defect, said electrons to induce said gas to etch said opaque defect without damaging underlying layers; and

- a pumping system to evacuate volatile byproducts of said etch.

26. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said electrons comprise a range of 0.3-3.0 keV.
27. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said electron delivery system further comprises focusing controls.
28. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said electron delivery system further comprises scanning controls.
29. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said gas comprises water or oxygen.
30. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said gas comprises Xenon Fluoride (XeF_2).
31. (Currently Amended) An apparatus comprising:
- a chamber, said chamber to hold a mask;
 - an imaging system for said chamber, said imaging system disposed directly over said mask, said imaging system to locate an opaque defect on the mask;
 - a gas delivery system for said chamber, said gas delivery system to dispense one or more gases towards said opaque defect ; and
 - an electron delivery system for said chamber, said electron delivery system to direct electrons towards said opaque defect, said electrons to induce

chemical etching of said opaque defect by said one or more gases without damaging underlying layers.

32. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said electrons comprise an acceleration voltage of about 1.0 keV or less.

33. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said chemical etching is reaction-limited and not mass transfer-limited.